

Keeping Baby Safe

For new moms, the safety of our babies is never far from our minds. We tend to worry about everything! But there's no need to be consumed with fear. We'll talk about what you can do to protect your newborn from hazards ranging from injuries to choking. Knowing how to prevent these problems can help put your mind at ease.

"I've never done this before and being responsible for a new baby is a little scary and overwhelming at first."

Driving your newborn home from the hospital is typically the first time you're fully responsible for their safety. Have a rear-facing infant car seat buckled into the back seat, preferably in the middle.

"Fire departments and hospitals often have car seat safety checks that can help you put the car seat in and this should be done before the baby is actually taken home from the hospital for the first time. If the car seat isn't placed correctly in the first it doesn't offer the infant the most protection. In some cases, it will actually put the infant in increased harm's way in an accident."

Don't use a second hand car seat.

"Even if there are no visible marks to the car seat some of the plastic pieces may have some damage to them and should not be reused."

Keep loose toys and other objects that could pose a choking hazard away from baby and always check the back seat when you leave the car. Exhausted parents may forget about a sleeping baby and put them at risk of hyperthermia, or overheating, in a hot vehicle.

It's natural to want your baby close to you and having them within arm's reach in the room where you sleep can make breastfeeding easier. But resist the temptation to let baby sleep in the same bed with you.

"I know it helps babies sleep better and it's cozy and it's nice for bonding. So, what we say is snuggle with the baby while you're awake. Comfort the baby. But make sure you have a separate sleep location for the baby, either a crib or a basinet."

Co-sleeping puts your baby at risk for suffocation.

"When you're in deep sleep and the baby is in bed with you that increases the chances of you rolling over on baby, all 180lbs of you on a 7 or 8 lb baby, they suffocate."

Sleeping in your bed also puts your baby at risk for sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS.

"Ninety per cent of babies who die of SIDS die before they're six months of age and the highest risk is between two and four months of age."

To help prevent SIDS always put your baby to sleep on their back.

"We believe that babies will be less likely to die of SIDS when they're on their backs because they don't sleep as well because they awake more easily and we think that arousal, waking up is a huge thing in terms of SIDS prevention."

Other safe sleep guidelines from the American academy of pediatrics include: • Have baby sleep on a firm mattress covered by a tight fitted sheet; Remove pillows, blankets, quilts, loose sheets and crib bumpers; Keep

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toys and soft objects out of baby's sleep area; and don't allow smoking near your baby. Be sure to talk to all your baby's caregivers about safe sleep.

"If grandma is taking care of the baby that grandma has a basinet also that has a firm surface and that anybody that's taking care of the infant knows the baby should only sleeping on his or her back."

As babies figure out the world around them, they tend to put everything in their mouths. That's why parents and caregivers need to keep small objects and some foods out of reach. Any object that is small enough to fit through a toilet paper roll is a potential choking hazard. These can lodge in the throat and cut off your baby's breathing.

"Choking is one of the things that probably every parent fears, and it is something that can affect infants and young children. It's important to know some of the differences and the recommended techniques for infants compared to adults."

First, determine if the child is actually choking.

"If the child can make a sound: if they cry, if they can cough you want to leave them alone because that means their airway is not completely obstructed and the best thing for them is to try to get that out themselves."

If the child is trying to cry or make a sound and can't, this means they're choking, and you need to act fast.

"I'm going to give a series of five back slaps. Okay right between the shoulder blades. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. I'm not hurting the infant. It's okay."

"The important thing is that the parents first take some action because it may be possible to dislodge the object and avoid the child from going further and further into a very critical condition. If the first minute or so of efforts to dislodge the object are not successful and the child is limp and unresponsive that would be a reasonable time to bring the child with you to the telephone and call 9-1-1."

If you haven't learned infant CPR contact the American Heart Association about taking a course or ask for a kit that teaches you in 20 minutes at home.

"The hardest part would probably be not knowing what she wants. When she cries and you go through the list: did we feed her, yes, did we change her, yes, have we played with her, yes, okay now what? And she's still crying, and it breaks your heart that you don't know what you can do to fix it."

By now you know the sound of your baby's cry.

"Babies get so tired that they can't sleep sometimes and that's when we see a lot of this crying."

"When you're that tired you just can't see straight, you can't think right."

When a baby's cries continue, nerves can get frazzled.

"Be aware of when you're extremely fatigued and overwhelmed. I think that's number one. They lose their guard. They lose the edge they have when they're overwhelmed. So, you have to accept the fact that if you have a newborn you're going to be fatigued."

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"Maybe you've got muscle tension. Maybe your heart rate is going up. Maybe you're thinking 'I just can't take it anymore.'"

Not knowing when to walk away from a crying baby is when tragedy can occur.

"One thing you should never do is shake your baby."

When it's done violently shaking can cause severe head and developmental injuries, and even death. This is known as Shaken Baby Syndrome.

"The term violent is important because everybody at one time or another does a game with the baby where they bounce them up and down and that's perfectly fine."

Some babies may actually cry most of the time they're awake, which for them is normal.

"The crying is your baby's way of communicating with you and I promise you will figure out what your child needs."

If you feel yourself losing patience with a crying baby, put her down in a safe place and take a short break to calm down.

"I don't know any baby who ever died of crying. I don't know any baby who ever was injured because they were crying. But I've seen countless hundreds and hundreds if not thousands of babies who have been injured because people got really frustrated with them when they were crying."

Secondhand smoke is what we breathe in when someone else is smoking. It can be dangerous, especially for young children.

"It's so important for those parents not to smoke around the child, particularly in the home and the automobile, in an enclosed space around that child. Ear infections are a common example of problems they have from secondhand smoke."

Children exposed to secondhand smoke are also more likely to have learning and behavioral problems as they grow older. Tell others not to smoke around your baby and remove the child from public places where there's tobacco smoke.

If you're a smoker, there's no better time to quit than now. Talk to your health care provider about ways to kick the habit.

This is also the best time to adopt other healthy habits, or get back to them, like exercise and healthy eating. Having a healthy lifestyle not only will help give you the stamina you need to be a good parent, it will also set a good example for your child. Remember, you are your child's first and best teacher. By serving as a role model for healthy living, you'll put them on the road to growing into a healthy young adult.

That road promises to be one filled with wonderful adventures for both you and your child. We wish you well as you begin this exciting journey together.